



## FORMAL EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA FROM 1926 TO 1953: ORIGINS, POLICIES, CHALLENGES, AND ACHIEVEMENTS

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### ABSTRACT.

*The current study aimed to examine the status of formal education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 1926, when an education directorate was established, to 1953, when this directorate was transformed into the Ministry of Education. The researcher employed a historical approach to align with the study's objectives. One of the key findings is that modern education began relatively late in the Arabian Peninsula. A small number of private schools were established in the western part of the country during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The study found that the education directorate successfully established schools in various Saudi cities and villages before it transitioned into a ministry. Another significant finding is that the education system in Saudi Arabia has consistently emphasized religious education, with religious subjects being extensively taught at all educational levels. Additionally, the system has been characterized by centralization across various sectors. The results further indicate that the initiation of public education faced considerable challenges, including financial difficulties and resistance from some parents who preferred traditional forms of education. Notably, the education system allowed slaves and their children to attend public schools, despite slavery being legal in the country until the early 1960s. At that time, girls' education was not yet widely available, and there were only a limited number of colleges.*

**Keywords:** *educational development, history of education in Saudi Arabia, public schools in Saudi Arabia, Saudi education, Directorate of Education*

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The history of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from the establishment of the formal educational system in 1926 to 1953, represents a foundational and transformative period that continues to shape the features of the educational renaissance the country is experiencing today. Despite the relatively recent adoption of formal education compared to other nations, the Kingdom has achieved remarkable progress in expanding access to education and institutional development within just a few decades. This progress is attributed mainly to the strategic vision adopted by the state and the societal conviction in the role of education in building individuals and advancing communities. Prior to the political unification of the Kingdom in 1932, education was limited to traditional, informal models known as *kuttab* (Qur'anic schools), which relied on individual efforts by literate persons who taught in exchange for modest fees or in-kind compensation. Such forms of education were typically accessible to children from middle- and upper-income families, while many children from low-income households were deprived of educational opportunities due to their families' inability to cover costs. Moreover, these families often depended on their children's labor in manual and subsistence occupations such as herding, farming, and construction. With the establishment of the Directorate of Education, the state laid the foundation for the first formal educational system in the country, grounded in principles of free education and the development of modern schooling (Umm Al-Qura Newspaper, 1926). This stage marked a critical turning point in the history of Saudi education, as the government began constructing schools, training teachers, standardizing curricula, and expanding education into regions that had long lacked access to organized schooling (Umm Al-Qura Newspaper, 1927;1928). The impact of early educational efforts in Saudi Arabia has become evident in the following decades. Recent statistics reveal that the Kingdom has achieved a significant decline in illiteracy rates, now approximately 3.7%, making it one of the lowest in the Arab, Asian, and African regions (Ministry of Education, 2021). Today, Saudi Arabia boasts over 36,000 schools, including approximately 23,000 public schools, which serve around 6.7 million students. This educational system employs more than 513,000 teachers, supported by around 106,000 administrative staff (Ministry of Education, 2025). In terms of higher education, the foundations were laid with the establishment of the first college, the College of Sharia in Makkah, in 1949. This was followed by the founding of the first Saudi university, King Saud University, in 1957. Since then, university education in Saudi Arabia has undergone substantial development. In 2024, the Kingdom had 43 universities, including 15 private universities and more than 50 private colleges. The number of students in higher education has reached approximately 1.1 million, which includes around 64,000 international students (Ministry of Education, 2025). The significant advancements observed in Saudi Arabia's sector are firmly based on the foundational efforts made between 1926 and 1952. This crucial period laid the structural and organizational groundwork for education in the Kingdom, establishing modern education as a key pillar of national development.

**Statement of Problem:**

Formal education represents one of the most important pillars of national development. From the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1926 until its transformation into a Ministry in 1953, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia witnessed a pivotal foundational phase in the path of formal education. Despite the importance of this phase, there is a noticeable lack of scholarly studies that analyze the roots of the Saudi education system from a comprehensive historical perspective, linking early educational policies to the social, economic, and cultural challenges facing the emerging state at the time. The problem of this study is to attempt to uncover the features of formal education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the founding period between 1926 and 1953. This is done by answering a number of questions about the policies adopted, the systems implemented, the challenges faced by the state's efforts to build a national education system, the role of centralization, and religious and nationalist motives in shaping this system, as well as the features of private and higher education during this period.

The scientific importance of the study lies in its ability to fill a gap in the educational literature on Saudi educational history, through documentation and critical analysis of early educational policies and systems, and an examination of their organizational, social, and religious dimensions. It also contributes to highlighting the national efforts made amidst limited resources and difficult social conditions at the time.

**Research Question:**

What was the status of formal education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the period from 1926 to 1953?

**Study Objectives:**

- To analyze the stages of development of formal education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia between 1926 and 1953, by studying the educational policies and systems adopted during that period and the agencies supervising their implementation.

- To uncover the most prominent challenges and difficulties faced by the Directorate of Education in spreading education and establishing schools, and to determine how the state dealt with them under complex economic and social conditions.
- To document early governmental and societal efforts to establish public and higher education, highlighting the impact these efforts had on building the infrastructure of the modern Saudi educational system.

**Study Methodology:**

The study relied on the historical, analytical, and descriptive research approach, as it was appropriate for the study's questions and objectives. Umm al-Qura newspaper, the official newspaper of the state from the reign of King Abdulaziz to the present day, was heavily relied upon. The National Center for Documents and Archives' publication of all issues of Umm al-Qura newspaper on its official website facilitated access to and gleaning of information from official sources, adding value to this research. In addition, the analytical approach was used to understand and analyze educational systems.

**Results:****1.1: Education regulation and policies**

Since the establishment of formal education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the country's educational policy has maintained a coherent and consistent foundation that serves as a reference framework for all educational practices and strategies. These foundations have remained firmly in place over the decades, forming the backbone of the educational system in terms of philosophy, goals, and implementation. At the forefront of these foundations is the religious foundation, which constitutes the cornerstone of Saudi educational philosophy. Education has been rooted in Islamic principles since its inception, reflected in the inclusion of Islamic studies across all educational stages. The state has aimed to instill Islamic values in students and foster a moral and spiritual conscience that aligns with the cultural and social identity of Saudi society. The linguistic foundation has also been firmly established through the official adoption of Modern Standard Arabic as the language of instruction. This policy, embedded in most educational regulations since the early formation of the education system, reflects a deep commitment to the Arabic language as a key component of Islamic and cultural identity, as well as a tool for national cohesion and educational unity. The national foundation stands as another essential pillar, where education is positioned as a means to promote national loyalty, serve national causes, and contribute to the country's developmental and visionary goals. This is evident in curricula that emphasize national identity and in activities that foster love for the homeland and commitment to civic responsibilities. Similarly, the social foundation has been a central focus of educational policy, recognizing education as a vital tool for building a cohesive society based on cooperation and shared responsibility. Policies have aimed to instill values such as respect, discipline, and solidarity in students, viewing schools not only as places of knowledge transmission but also as spaces for moral development and positive social interaction. Educational policy has also recognized the economic foundation, linking education directly to national development. This is particularly evident in the expansion of technical and vocational education, as well as the alignment of higher education outputs with the labor market's needs, ultimately supporting the development of a skilled workforce and contributing to a knowledge-based economy. One of the key institutional characteristics of the Saudi educational system is its reliance on centralization in administration and supervision. From its early stages to the present, the system has followed a centralized model, where the Ministry of Education (formerly the Directorate of Education) oversees all aspects of school management, including teacher appointments, school construction and maintenance, funding, and curriculum development. This centralization was further reinforced by the issuance of the Unified Curriculum System in 1927, which mandated uniform national curricula across all public schools. This approach helped achieve coherence in educational messages and ensure consistent quality in learning outcomes. The 1929 School System marked a foundational milestone in the development of formal education in Saudi Arabia. As the first comprehensive educational law, it comprised 88 articles across seven chapters, addressing various aspects of school administration, including the roles of principals, assistants, teachers, students, disciplinary measures, examinations, and general provisions. This system reflected the centralized and Islamic character of Saudi education, emphasizing the use of Arabic as the official language, the provision of free education, the importance of ethical conduct, standardized curricula, and attention to student safety and health. It also prohibited corporal punishment and underscored the importance of written administrative procedures, setting a clear regulatory framework for public schools in the Hejaz region. A decade later, the 1939 Amiri School System replaced the earlier law, expanding its scope to include all public schools across the Kingdom. This new system included 203 articles across 11 chapters, offering more detailed governance and introducing key updates. While retaining core principles—such as Islamic foundations, centralization, and educational ethics—it also introduced stricter oversight, including the regulation of teacher workloads, the allowance of corporal punishment under controlled conditions, the prohibition of political activities by school staff, and the enforcement of national symbols, such as the Saudi flag. Additionally, it incorporated new provisions such as financial incentives for students and judicial oversight of religious

education. Together, the two systems charted the evolution of Saudi education from a regional endeavor to a structured national framework (Albeshir, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2003; Umm Al-Qura Newspaper 1926; 1927; 1029).

### **1.2: Education of Children with Disabilities in Saudi Arabia:**

Modern educational services for children with disabilities in Saudi Arabia began to emerge in the late 1950s, specifically after the transformation of the Directorate of Knowledge into the Ministry of Education. Prior to that, there were no modern schools dedicated to educating children who were blind, deaf, or had learning difficulties during that period. The first specialized institute for children with disabilities was established in 1960, dedicated to the education of children who are visually impaired. However, before the rise of modern institutions, traditional forms of education played a significant role in serving children with disabilities, particularly those who were blind. These children were often educated in mosques, where they received training and preparation to become religious scholars or imams (Ministry of Education, 2003).

### **1.3: Female Education in Saudi Arabia:**

The experience of female education in Saudi Arabia has undergone multiple phases of development over the past few decades. In the early years of modern education, there were widespread societal concerns and resistance toward educating women. However, the Saudi government remained committed to advancing girls' education and proceeded with the establishment of numerous public schools for females. From the outset and continuing to the present day, girls' schools have remained separate from boys' schools due to prevailing cultural and societal norms. Modern schooling for girls did not begin until the second half of the 1950s, with the opening of a limited number of private schools in western Saudi Arabia. However, the true beginning of organized female education came in the early 1960s, when a dedicated General Presidency for Girls' Education was established. This administrative body was tasked with building schools for girls, as well as training and qualifying female teachers. In 2002, the General Presidency for Girls' Education was merged into the Ministry of Education, making the Ministry responsible for the education of both males and females under a unified structure (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2003). Since modern female education did not begin until the latter half of the 20th century, it falls outside the historical scope of this study, which focuses on the early foundational stages of formal education in Saudi Arabia.

### **1.4: Education of Enslaved Individuals in Saudi Arabia:**

The Saudi government officially abolished slavery in 1962, following earlier efforts to curb the slave trade beginning with the establishment of the Third Saudi State in 1932. At the time when modern schooling began to take shape in Saudi Arabia, there were still groups of enslaved individuals, most of whom were of African descent. It is noteworthy that the educational regulations and laws issued by the Directorate of Knowledge, founded in 1926, did not include any prohibitions against the enrollment of enslaved persons or their children in public schools. This stands in clear contrast to Western countries, many of which explicitly denied enslaved individuals and their descendants the right to education. Furthermore, public schools in Saudi Arabia have never practiced racial segregation. Unlike the situation in the United States, where children of different racial backgrounds were historically placed in separate schools—a practice that continued until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—Saudi schools have always been inclusive. Children of all skin colors and socioeconomic backgrounds have studied together in the same classrooms and school buildings, without separation based on race or social class. This inclusive educational approach demonstrates a fundamental difference: while social challenges certainly existed, the Saudi educational system was not built on racially discriminatory foundations, and its public schools were open to all individuals equally, reinforcing the value of educational access for all, regardless of background (Albeshir, 2024).

### **1.5: Formal Education and the Emergence of Educational Supervision in Saudi Arabia:**

Since its inception in 1926, formal education in Saudi Arabia has been characterized by strong centralization, including centralized supervision of both teachers and schools. The foundation for educational supervision in the Kingdom was laid with the establishment of the Directorate of Knowledge (Dirārat al-Ma'ārif) in 1926. In its early days, a system of informal "monitoring" was in place, whereby individuals followed up on school affairs without holding official titles or being assigned to a formal department. By 1929, this monitoring system began to take clearer form, with the establishment of the Board for the Supervision of Lessons and Teaching in the Grand Mosque (*al-Haram al-Makki*) under the leadership of religious scholar Sheikh Abdullah bin Hassan Al Al-Sheikh. This Board operated under the authority of the Director of Knowledge and included nine scholars and students of knowledge appointed as educational supervisors. Among them were notable figures such as Sayyid Abdul-Zahir Abu al-Samh, a scholar from Al-Azhar and Imam of the Grand Mosque, and Sheikh Bahjat Al-Bitar from Syria—this was due to the limited number of Saudi nationals specialized in education at the time. The early phase of educational supervision, prior to the establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1953,



was primarily characterized by a model of inspection. During this period, the school principal played the role of inspector, later to be known as the supervisory function. The principal served as a resident inspector within the school. According to the 1929 School Regulations, the school principal was responsible for duties such as classroom visits, teacher evaluations, reviewing students' and teachers' notebooks, and providing individual feedback to teachers. The regulations also required principals to submit an annual report to the Directorate of Knowledge, including assessments of each teacher and summaries of student performance.

In 1937, the Directorate of Knowledge sought international expertise and appointed Mr. Ibrahim Shoury from Egypt as the first official inspector in the Directorate. He was later promoted to the position of Director of Knowledge. In this new phase, inspectors were assigned to monitor both the pedagogical and administrative aspects of schools. Initially, inspectors delivered their feedback verbally, but over time, they were required to record their observations in dedicated inspection logs. Each inspector was given a personalized supervision plan, detailing the specific schools and educational activities under their oversight. This foundational phase in the development of educational supervision in Saudi Arabia laid the groundwork for the more institutionalized practices that followed with the establishment of the Ministry of Education and the professionalization of supervision roles in the subsequent decades (Al-Salman, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2003).

### 1.6: Private education:

Private education in the Arabian Peninsula prior to the reign of King Abdulaziz was largely shaped by individual initiatives and charitable efforts that emerged in response to the societal need for learning, particularly in the absence of a modern state and its institutions. During that period, traditional learning models prevailed, most notably in the form of *kuttab* schools, which focused primarily on memorizing the Qur'an and teaching basic reading and writing skills. Organized private schools were few, characterized by a lack of structure, absence of government oversight, and a general shortage of regulations to ensure their continuity and quality. These challenges were exacerbated by the Ottoman Empire's neglect of the educational sector, as it prioritized military and administrative matters over the development of schools. This vacuum allowed foreign missionary missions to enter several parts of the region—particularly the Hijaz—under the pretense of providing medical and educational services. In this context, several pioneering educational initiatives emerged to establish private formal education (Al-Amoush & Al-Sharaa, 2021). The most prominent of these was the Al-Sawlatiyya School, founded by Indian scholar Rahmatullah al-Kairanawi in 1868 with the financial support of the Indian benefactress *Sawlat al-Nisa*. This school represented a progressive model, combining religious sciences with rational subjects such as logic, astronomy, and mathematics, and offered a structured multi-level academic program (Al-Faqih, 1994). Following King Abdulaziz's unification of the Hijaz in 1925 and his broader efforts to unify the Arabian Peninsula under a single state, the foundations of the modern Saudi state began to take form. One of his earliest steps in nation-building was the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1926, the first official body tasked with supervising both public and private education in the Kingdom. This marked a pivotal turning point in the history of private education, which was now subject to formal state oversight and integrated into the national vision for human development (Maqaddami, 1985).

Between 1926 and 1938, private education experienced significant growth and increasing regulation, with the issuance of several legislative frameworks designed to organize the sector. Key among these were: the Council of Education Regulation (1927), the Unified Curriculum Regulation (1927), the General School Regulation (1929), and, most notably, the Private Schools Regulation (1938). The latter was the first law to explicitly differentiate private schools from their public counterparts and to outline the legal and administrative requirements for establishing and operating such institutions. The 1938 regulation stipulated several foundational conditions, including that school founders must be Muslim, school principals must be Saudi nationals, and priority in hiring should be given to qualified Saudi teachers (Umm Al-Qura Newspaper, 1938). The regulation also required schools to follow approved curricula and submit annual reports to the Directorate of Education. These reforms significantly contributed to the institutionalization of private education, both quantitatively and qualitatively. A wide range of private schools emerged across the Kingdom, including boys', evening literacy programs, and specialized institutions in languages and religious studies, while student enrollment and curriculum content expanded. King Abdulaziz personally supported the development of private education, providing financial and logistical support, visiting key institutions such as Al-Sawlatiyya and Al-Falah schools, and expressing public admiration for their contributions. His involvement reflects the foundational Saudi leadership's recognition of education as a critical pillar in national development (Ministry of Education, 2003).

#### 1.6.1: The Oldest Private Schools in Saudi Arabia:

Al-Sawlatiyya School is considered one of the oldest private schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was founded in 1868 in Makkah by Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi, with support from the Indian philanthropist *Sawlat Al-Nisa*. The school marked the beginning of modern, structured education in the Hijaz region, combining religious studies with rational sciences and adopting a clear, multi-level academic structure. Following this, Abdul Haq Qari established Al-Fakhriyya Ottoman School in 1881, and in 1886, Abdulkhaliq Muhammad

Hussein Al-Bengali founded Dar Al-Faizeen School, both located in Makkah. These schools continued the educational movement that was gradually gaining momentum in the region. In Jeddah, Haj Muhammad Ali Zainal founded Al-Falah School in 1905, which became one of the most prominent private schools in the western region of Arabia. A branch was later opened in Makkah in 1912. The year 1909 saw the establishment of Al-Khayyat Charity School by Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Khayyat, along with Dar Al-Shifa School, also in Makkah(Maqaddami,1985). During the first half of the 20th century, particularly between 1923 and 1938, numerous other private schools emerged across various regions of the Kingdom, further advancing the educational landscape. In Al-Ahsa, Sheikh Hamad Al-Naeem established Al-Najah Private School in 1923, while Sheikh Abdullah Al-Qar'awi founded Al-Qar'awi School in Unaizah (Al-Qassim) in 1927. This school became the nucleus of a major grassroots educational movement that later expanded to more than 2,310 schools in southern Saudi Arabia and even into Yemen. At its peak, Al-Qarawi's schools served over 75,000 students; however, the movement gradually declined by 1955 as public schools took their place. In Makkah, Tahdhib Al-Akhlaq School for girls was established in 1929, followed by Al-Najah Night School in 1931, founded by Sheikh Abdullah Khoja, a graduate of Al-Falah School. In Madinah, Dar Al-Hadith School was founded by Sheikh Abdul-Zahir Abu Al-Samh in 1933. That same year, Dar Al-Uloom Al-Deeniya School was established in Makkah by Sheikh Mohsen bin Ali Al-Masawi, a graduate of Al-Sawlatiyya. Additional schools emerged in 1934, such as Sabeel Al-Rashad School in Al-Ahsa, founded by Ahmed Suleiman Al-Sukait, and Fatima Al-Turkiyah School, a private girls' school in Makkah. In 1935, several more schools were established in Madinah, including Tahdhib Al-Ihsaniyyah School, another Dar Al-Hadith School founded by Sheikh Muhammad Al-Dihlawi, and the School of Tajweed and Qira'at (Qur'anic Recitation). In 1936, Ahmad Mo'men established the Night School for Foreign Languages, while Mahdi Al-Musleh, then Director of Public Security, founded Dar Al-Aytam (Orphanage School) in Makkah. That same year, Mohammad Salamah Allah founded Dar Al-Salam Private School. In 1937, Al-Najah Night School for Teaching English was founded in Madinah, and in 1936, a private school was established in Al-Majma'ah, which later became a government school. Lastly, in 1938, Mohammad Al-Sanari established Al-Sanari School in Riyadh(Al-Salman, 1999;Al-Zahrani,2006;Hamza,1967).

### 1.7:Higher Education:

The first institution of higher education in Saudi Arabia was established in 1949 with the founding of the College of Sharia in the city of Makkah, which specialized in Islamic sciences. Following that, in 1951, a college was founded in Makkah to train teachers to work in intermediate and secondary schools. In 1953, the first college in the capital, Riyadh, was established, along with a College of Sharia. The following year, in 1954, a College of Arabic Language was also established in Riyadh. In 1957, the first university in both Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula was founded: King Saud University. Before the emergence of local higher education institutions, a small number of Saudi students who wished to pursue university studies enrolled in institutions abroad, particularly in Arab countries such as Egypt and Lebanon. The government actively supported and financed international scholarships. The first such initiative was in 1927, when the government sent 14 students to Egypt to pursue university education. At that time, the state was known as the Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd and its Dependencies, before officially becoming the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 (Ministry of Education, 2019). Additionally, some Saudi students were sent to study in Lebanon in 1930, followed by the dispatch of three students to the United Kingdom. About five years later, in 1935, ten students were sent to Italy. In 1937, the School for Scholarship Preparation (Madrasat Tahdir al-Bu'that) was established in Makkah. This modern secondary school aimed to prepare students for admission into universities abroad. Its establishment came as a response to the academic under-preparedness of many students who had previously failed to complete their studies abroad. The school adopted the Egyptian curricula, as most Saudi scholarships prior to 1960 were directed to Egyptian universities. In 1939, the top ten graduates of the Scholarship Preparation School were sent abroad. The number of Saudi students sent on international scholarships increased steadily after that due to the political leadership's growing confidence in the value of education. Furthermore, the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 1938 and its export beginning the following year (1939) significantly boosted the government's ability to fund scholarship programs and establish schools across Saudi Arabia's regions. Additionally, oil companies—most notably Aramco—played a significant role in sponsoring Saudi students for professional and higher education abroad (Albeshir,2019;Al-Salman,1999 ;Ministry of Education, 2019).

### 1.8:Public School Funding :

Since the establishment of the public education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the late 1920s, the country has adopted a centralized funding model, whereby schools rely entirely on direct financial support from the state. This model reflects the centralized nature of the educational system, in which funding allocations are included within the national budget and managed by the relevant authority at the time—initially the Directorate of Education, which later evolved into the Ministry of Education. The Saudi government has consistently maintained a high level of spending on the education sector, with approximately 25% of the national budget allocated to education in most years. This substantial investment underscores the strategic importance the state

places on education as a cornerstone for national development and the formation of a skilled and knowledgeable citizenry. Notably, the state's commitment to funding education was not solely dependent on the economic improvements following the discovery and commercial export of oil in the late 1930s, as oil was the country's most significant economic resource. Even during the early years of the Kingdom, when economic conditions were modest and resources limited, the expansion of education was considered a national priority. Available financial resources were directed toward establishing schools and hiring qualified teaching staff, reflecting the Saudi leadership's conviction in the vital role of education in the country's progress. Thus, the centralized funding model adopted by the Kingdom from the outset of its formal education system significantly contributed to the development of a widespread educational infrastructure and ensured the equitable distribution of resources across regions, despite the developmental and economic challenges of the early state-building period (Al-Salman, 1999; Al-Zahrani, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2003).

### 1.9: Challenges of the Directorate of Education:

Historian Mohammed Al-Salman (1999) noted that the Saudi Directorate of Education (Dirārat al-Ma'ārif) faced numerous challenges in its efforts to promote modern education during the early years of the Kingdom's establishment. These challenges reflected the state's transitional nature as it shifted from traditional structures to modern institutions. One of the most pressing obstacles was the fragile economic condition of the nascent Saudi state. The first budget allocated to education amounted to only 5,665 British pounds (approximately 66,650 Saudi riyals), at a time when no official national currency had yet been issued. With the emergence of a formal financial system in 1928, education funding gradually increased, reaching £14,791 in the second year and £22,140 in the third (Hamza, 1967).

Social resistance also posed a significant challenge. Many parents in various regions remained unconvinced of the value of modern education, favoring traditional learning methods such as Qur'anic schools (kuttāb) and mosque study circles. Moreover, harsh living conditions and economic hardship led families to prioritize their children's labor over their education, particularly in agriculture, herding, and small-scale trade. Recognizing this, King Abdulaziz introduced student stipends and family incentives to alleviate the economic burden and promote school attendance—a clear indication of his commitment to educating the Saudi population.

Culturally, skepticism toward modern sciences was widespread. Subjects such as geography, English, and art were sometimes viewed as potentially harmful, with some fearing they might lead to religious deviation or moral decline. From a logistical perspective, the vast geographical expanse of the Kingdom and the scattered distribution of its population made it difficult to recruit and deploy a sufficient number of qualified teachers. Furthermore, most educational materials had to be imported, requiring financial resources that were not readily available. The shortage of trained teachers, particularly at the elementary level, prompted the establishment of the Saudi Scientific Institute in 1926 as an initial step toward local teacher preparation.

Global economic crises, including the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s and World War II, further strained the Kingdom's educational development. These events negatively impacted the primary sources of national income, such as the annual Hajj pilgrimage, prior to the discovery and commercial export of oil in the late 1930s. Another significant challenge came from abroad. Egyptian authorities did not recognize Saudi secondary certificates, and since Egypt was the primary destination for Saudi students seeking higher education, this posed a serious problem. Many Saudi students struggled academically, particularly in foreign languages and natural sciences, which led Egyptian institutions to restrict their admission. To address this issue, the Saudi government established a Preparatory School for Scholarship Students, adopting the Egyptian curriculum to better prepare students for study abroad (Al-Salman, 1999).

### 1.10: Achievements of the Directorate of Education in Establishing Public Schools:

The launch of public education in western Saudi Arabia marked a significant milestone, especially since the region had only a limited number of modern schools before King Abdulaziz unified the Hejaz region. The first public schools under the Saudi era were opened in Medina in 1926, namely *Al-Mansouria* and *Al-Nasseriya* schools. A year later, in 1927, two public schools were established in Mecca: *Al-Aziziya School*, named in honor of King Abdulaziz, followed by *Al-Saudia*, *Al-Faisaliah*, and *Al-Mohammadiyah* schools. Subsequently, the number of schools in both Mecca and Medina grew steadily. The spread of education in these two holy cities is attributed not only to their religious significance in Islam but also to the presence of structured educational efforts during the Ottoman and Hashemite eras. However, these systems were limited, and illiteracy was widespread. Mecca also witnessed the establishment of the first institution of higher education in the Kingdom, the *College of Sharia*, in 1949, specializing in Islamic sciences. In Jeddah, the first public elementary school, *Al-Saudia Elementary School*, opened in 1926 and offered classes in both the morning and evening. The town of Rabigh saw the opening of its first government school in 1929, as did Taif, which also established *Al-Saudia School* in the same year. In Yanbu, *Al-Amiriya School* opened in 1927, while in Al-Khurma, the first elementary school began operating in 1950. In Al-Wajh, the first elementary school was established in 1926 (Salman, 1999).

In the capital city of Riyadh, the first public school, *Madrasat Al-Umara* (The Princes' School), was founded in 1937, specifically for the sons of King Abdulaziz. That same year, the first public elementary school for the general public was also opened. This was followed by the opening of *Al-Aziziya School* in the *Al-Zuhairah* district in 1942. After King Abdulaziz's historic visit to Egypt, where he met with King Farouk and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt aboard a naval ship in the Bitter Lakes region in early 1946, the citizens of Riyadh collected funds to honor the King with a celebratory event. Instead, the King directed that the funds be used for charity, and it was agreed to establish a school in *Al-Batha*, known as *Al-Tadkhariya School (Memorial School)* in 1948. Schools continued to be established in Riyadh, including *Al-Faisaliah School* in *Al-Shumaisi* in 1940, along with other schools throughout the Najd region.

In Al-Kharj, the first public school was *Al-Saudia School*, established in 1943. In Al-Dilam, the first government school opened in 1946. In the Sudair region, a school was opened in *Jalajil* in 1949. *Shagra* saw its first school in 1941, while in *Al-Aflaj*, the first school opened in 1950. In *Al-Dawadmi* and *Al-Zulfi*, public schools opened in 1948 (1367 AH). In *Thadiq*, *Thadiq Elementary School* was established in 1949. Interestingly, some towns in Najd preceded the capital, Riyadh, in establishing schools. In *Al-Majma'ah*, a private school became public in 1937. In *Buraidah*, a private school founded by Abdullah bin Salim was later taken over by the government, and he became its principal. In *Unaizah*, a similar transformation occurred with a school founded by Saleh bin Saleh, which became public in 1937. In *Al-Rass*, public education began in 1944, and in *Al-Bukayriyah*, the first elementary school opened in 1947 (Salman, 1999).

In the Eastern Province, the first elementary school opened in *Jubail* in 1938. In *Khobar*, a public school was established in 1941. In *Qatif*, a school opened in 1938 but was closed due to low enrollment and later reopened in 1948. In *Al-Ahsa*, the first public elementary school was established in *Hofuf* in 1937, and in *Dammam*, the first elementary school opened in 1951.

In northern Saudi Arabia, *Turaif* saw its first public school open in 1952. In 1953, elementary schools were established in *Rafha* and *Arar*. In 1954, a school was opened in *Al-Layla*. In the *Tabuk* region, the first school, *Al-Saudia School*, was opened in 1941. In *Sakaka*, *King Abdulaziz School* was founded in 1943.

In southern Saudi Arabia, the Al-Baha region opened its first public school in 1934. In Asir, the first elementary school, known as Al-Saudia School, was founded in Abha in 1936. In Najran, the first public school, also named Al-Saudia School, opened in 1947. Bisha established its first school in 1953, while King Abdulaziz School was founded in Jazan in 1936. Additionally, Al-Kadwah Elementary School opened in Al-Qunfudhah in 1945. Many early elementary schools were named Al-Saudia School, reflecting a national effort to unify education across the Kingdom (Salman, 1999).

The Directorate of Education has made a significant leap in modern education overall. By 1952, before being transformed into the Ministry of Education (later renamed), due to increased responsibilities and a growing population, the number of public elementary schools had reached 306, serving approximately 39,920 students and taught by 1,472 teachers. Additionally, the Directorate established 10 secondary schools and institutes, which enrolled 1,650 students taught by 175 teachers, along with the opening of a technical (industrial) school (Al-Salman, 1999; Al-Zahrani, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2003).

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